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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: RUSSIA HAS LOW HOPES FOR SEPTEMBER 17
GENEVA TALKS

Classified By: Acting Pol M/C David Kostelancik for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)
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¶1. (C) MFA 4th CIS Department Deputy Director Alexei Dvinyanin told us September 8 that he had just finished all the papers for DFM Karasin to use at the Georgia-South Ossetia/Abkhazia talks in Geneva September 17. He reported that the Russian side expected no breakthroughs, no progress, but hopefully also no backsliding. Russia intended to raise the Georgians' seizing of a Turkish ship in Abkhaz waters, claiming Georgian forces boarded the ship by declaring they were Russian coast guards, and only then revealing that they were Georgians (a claim the GOG has denied). Dvinyanin expected the Turks would make strong common cause with GOR on this matter.

¶2. (C) In the longer term, Dvinyanin noted Russia's goal for the next year to front-load money on border defenses for South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in order to expeditiously put in place all the infrastructure necessary to deter "possible future Georgian aggression." He anticipated that with the completion of that work, emphasis would shift to economic reconstruction in the breakaway regions, with a focus on schools, health care, and continued infrastructure links with Russia (such as the gas pipeline now running from Russia to Tskhinvali).

¶3. (C) Dvinyanin said neither Karasin nor anyone else in the MFA had any illusions that other countries would soon recognize the breakaway regions. However, Russia intended over time to find ways to engage civil society representatives in South Ossetia and Abkhazia -- NGOs, church leaders, etc. -- with their counterparts in other countries, perhaps with Russia acting as the intermediary. That would amount both to de facto recognition and simultaneously meet the internal needs of the regions. The goal, Dvinyanin stressed, was to have the GOR play less and less of an intermediary role while ensuring that South Ossetian and Abkhaz needs (defense, economic, contact with outside world) were met.
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